

The Tiller

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Correction

The photo of the batteau crew eating lunch on page 5 of the Summer 2007 Tiller was taken on the "Thomas Jefferson's Spirit of New London" and not the "Spirit of the James" as was reported.

On the Cover:

One of the few remaining fields growing tobacco in Maryland, at the National Colonial Farm.
Photo by Ashley Egan

On the Back Cover:

Shannon Egan playing in corn at Forrest Hill Farm.
Photo by Ashley Egan



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Robert M. “Buddy” High

Hello to all,

Summer is winding down, I hope you all have had lots of fun and are ready to start thinking about next year and how we can work together to make our organizations flourish.

We are already starting to plan the 2008 James River Batteau Festival. We would love your input on this last year’s festival, what you liked and disliked, so we can make next year’s festival even better. Better yet, how about joining us at the next planning meeting? It will be held Saturday, November 17, 2007 at 12:30 pm at New London Ruritan Building on Highway 460 West. It is almost across from the New London Elementary School if you are coming from Lynchburg, Va. If you get to the Sheets, you have gone too far.

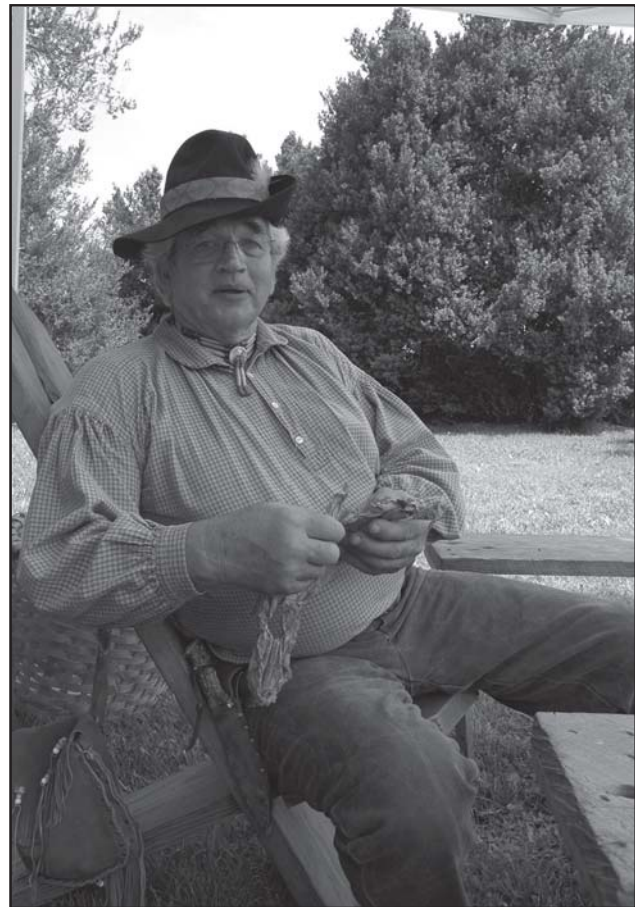
I look forward to catching up with my “batteau family” every year on the river. Every festival brings new memories and the fellowship of the crews. We all need to make sure we are spreading the word about all the fun and adventures we have had to attract more members to come along to join us.

We are having our VC&NS Annual Meeting the weekend of April 4-6, 2008, at the Airfield Conference Center in Wakefield, Va. We are planning a weekend of fellowship and relaxation, with brainstorming sessions to find new strategies to help strengthen VC&NS in the future. Don’t forget, every forest starts with a simple seed, so please bring your ideas, no matter how small. You never know when someone else may have something to add and before you know it we will all be re-energized, ready, and willing to accomplish our mission. Please save the date and watch for more information.

As an organization we are at a crossroads, the James River Batteau Festival broke even (for the first time) while the VC&NS membership has hit an all-time low. Our Board Meetings are

attended by the same 15 people; our District Directors don’t attend, nor send an update. We cannot handle this change without your help, this is your organization, not mine nor any other member of the board. An organization is only as active as its membership, the futures of our organizations are in your hands. Let me know what is important to you and what kinds of activities you would like us to do. We can come up with the grandest ideas, but if we are going in the wrong direction, it won’t matter.

Stay safe, I am looking forward to seeing all of you soon.



Buddy High,
Photo by Holt Messerly

The 18th Century is Coming Back

by Ashley Egan

Two hundred years ago, the canals were the super highways and the batteaux were the eighteen wheelers transporting produce from the farm to the city market. Today, with global warming, fear of pesticides and disease, and the increasing price of gas, many people are dissatisfied with the 21st Century practices and are looking back to the past for new ideas.

Farming has changed since the days of the batteauxmen. As transportation has gotten better, we have started importing food from all around the world. When you buy produce at the grocery store, only pennies on the dollar actually make it back to the farm that produces it. Also, with the tobacco-buyouts programs, farmers are faced with a dilemma, how do they stay in business?

Enter the “Buy Local” or “Slow Food” Movement, where people buy food and products directly from the farm, so that the money we spend actually ends up in the farmer’s pocket.

Editor’s Note

Everything today is fast – boats, cars, dinners. If we are hungry, we can get a hot meal in minutes from our microwave. If we want strawberries in December, we can find them in our supermarket. If we need to get somewhere we get in our cars and get there in minutes instead of hours or days.

In this accelerated life, some of us have chosen to slow-down, whether it be a person who chooses to go to the farmer’s market instead of the supermarket or a group of people who take a week to boat down a river instead of the hours that it would take to drive it, we see value in the old ways and fight to protect them.

This issue is dedicated to the farmers who inspired the batteauxmen of old and who need our help today.

Farmer’s Market-

These markets are where farmers and local crafters sell their wares directly to the customers. This way to get your food directly from the source. It also ensures that the money you spend on your food goes to the farmer producing it.

Community Supported Agriculture-

This a great way to connect farmers with consumers. Customers pay a set fee, or work a set amount of hours, and get a share of the products from the farm, by picking up shares directly from the farm or at a set place.

Pick-Your-Own-

Throughout the year you can travel to a farm and pick different fruits and vegetables. Often they are advertised in your local newspapers.

Agrotourism-

Many farms are setting up shops, and events to get people more involved.

For More Information;

www.localharvest.org-

This is a national website with information about CSAs, Farmers Markets and other events.

www.pickyourown.org

This website shows you where you can find pick-your-own farms around the country.



Curing Tobacco
Photo by Nadia Grenier



An example of a modern garden that incorporates some of the techniques used in slave gardens.

Photo courtesy of Michael Twitty

Purposeful Patches: The Gardening Plots of Enslaved African Virginians

By Michael W. Twitty

Editor's Note; Mr. Twitty has written several books about the life and traditions of Enslaved Africans in Maryland and Virginia. For more information about Mr. Twitty or his journey of self-discovery through the food of his ancestors, go to www.afrofoodways.com.

“Privileges of the Negroes on the Island Plantation: 1. To Each of you will be allotted a small spot of ground for a garden.....”

—Richard Eppes, Petersburg, Virginia

Plying the waters of the Potomac, Rappahannock, York, James, Appomattox or Staunton rivers, a batteaux crew might have seen what many 18th century observers described as “small villages” of enslaved Africans living on large plantations bordering the water’s edge. Brought from locations along the West and Central African coast as dispersed as Senegambia, Igboland, and historic Kongo-Angola, enslaved African Virginians were pioneers in their own right, becoming one people out of many, internally charged to make exile into home. The difference between the world of enslavers and enslaved would have been most apparent to watermen—the linear, balanced and well-ordered “manor home,” and its dependencies would have

contrasted markedly with the landscape of the enslaved. The cabins, set at a distance, and the woods at water’s edge, would have been dotted with small gardens maintained by enslaved Blacks for their own use and for production of saleable produce. Through wood-ways and waterways an economy based on these gardens thrived and laid the foundations for African Virginian contributions to Southern foodways as well as the culture of gardening on which that tradition is based.

“The Negroes make a fence; then drive into the ground chestnut stakes about two feet apart in a straight row and twist in the boughs of red cedar, which grows in great plenty here.”

—Philip Fithian, Nomini Hall

In the early 18th century, many of the provisional gardens that some enslaved Virginians were allowed to maintain, were fenced in with

wattle, akin to traditions brought from southeastern Nigeria, Ghana and Senegambia. Had he visited West Africa, Fithian, a tutor at Nomini Hall in Westmoreland County, would have seen similar gardens fenced in similar ways. The gardens and the clusters of fruit trees planted about “the quarter” would have been powerfully familiar elements in the lives of enslaved people. Ranging in size from a plot of land equal to that of the cabin, to plots in “undesirable” forest clearings a half an acre or more in size, the garden, also known as a “truck patch,” (truck meaning food or “grub”) was crucial to a people whose diet was based on corn, salt herrings, salt pork, and occasional rations of molasses. The truck patch re-centered the diet on traditional African staples—starchy roots and grains, leafy greens, legumes, spices, and domesticated fruit.

The larger the workforce, the larger the gardens; the demands of tobacco inhibited smaller Black communities from maintaining substantial truck patches. Elders and children, both of whom were assigned minor chores as part of their day to day duties, were the predominant stewards of the patch; while adult men and women would work

the plots at night and on Saturday half-days and Sunday afternoons. The patches were not aesthetically vacant; many of the symbols of a developing Afri-Creole spiritual world built from a variety of African, European and Native American beliefs and customs would have probably adorned the space. Power objects (charms)—bags, feathers tied in bunches, shells, special rocks or earth would have been carefully placed in gardens to attract fertility, growth and plentitude, and to serve as a warning to would-be thieves to keep their distance. Strips of cloth might furl in the breeze announcing spiritual protection and the presence of Spirit. Growing gourds suggest not only the utility of using fencing as a support, but they also suggest capturing or arresting spiritual forces before they entered the garden or home.

Some of the crops cultivated would have been strongly associated with African origins and African cultures, including several central and South American cultigens brought to West Africa by the Portuguese two centuries before. When slave ships traveled up the tributaries of the Chesapeake, often delivering their cargo directly



This was taken at Tripple Springs, an organic farm in Baden, MD. Since one of the women who ran the farm had recently graduated from college, where she had studied organic farming, they utilized different planting techniques, including planting different plants in rows together (for example-kale and radishes), planting in mounds. They also planted lots of flowers to attract beneficial insects and keep detrimental insects away from the crops. Photo by Ashley Egan

to tobacco planters, they carried small collections of seeds, plants, and other exotics associated with their human chattel. It was considered wise to have on hand foods and produce associated with whatever part of Africa enslaved people were shipped from—black eyed peas, sorghum, rice, and the like. Hence, it is likely that a shipment of Angolans, arriving with one of their staple foods, “nguba,” would have been responsible for the introduction of peanuts into Virginia agriculture and foodways, so that by the 1780’s Thomas Jefferson could speak of “groundnuts” growing in the gardens of his beloved state.

Some crops were brought after their established use in the West Indies—such as okra, tomatoes, hot peppers, and sweet potatoes. Others were introduced over time from both Africa and Europe—common kitchen herbs, hops, watermelons, muskmelons, eggplant, and members of the Brassica family (turnips, cabbages, kales, coleworts, spinach, etc.) And, of course, a number of the crops grown would have owed their presence to the indigenous peoples of the Chesapeake and West Indies—corn, cushaws, squash, pumpkins, pole beans, bush beans, and sunflowers. Cash crops were occasionally raised at the discretion of the plantation owner, and small crops of corn, tobacco, wheat and cotton might be raised in the truck patch as well.

If an enslaved household was fortunate to have a stable and reasonably secure place in a plantation community, the truck patch would have been re-fertilized over a long period of time with ashes from the fireplace, chicken manure from the coops adjacent to the cabin, and tops and other clippings from cooking. Black eyed peas, among other types of cowpeas, not only had high and nutritious yields, but they restored nitrogen to the soil. Other crops like members of the *brassica* family did well on poor soils and heavily produced vitamin rich leaves in the spring and fall. Ditto for sweet potatoes, which run to mostly leaves when raised on soil that is too rich. Thus, these crops—field peas, collards, turnips, cabbages, sweet potatoes, and the like became the standard vegetables in the Virginia diet.

Intercropping was the preferred means of cultivation. Much like the “Three Sisters,” style of cultivation popular among North American First Nations, enslaved Africans brought a system of growing complimentary crops together for the sake of proper shading, keeping down weeds and insects and promoting complimentary nutrient exchanges among the plants themselves. Gourds, cymling squashes and the “highly esteemed” sweet potato pumpkin, or cushaw, were raised along the fence line for support. Pole beans were grown along stakes and sticks against the cabin wall, and herbs and red peppers were grown at door side or in places where kitchen waste was disposed of. Basil was grown for protection against evil spirits, and red peppers were particularly useful as medicine and as a means to evade detection from dogs while running off. Climbing arbors for hops and wild grapes were also found among the truck patches, suggesting sustained marketing and production, and additions to the economy created by enslaved men and women.

Enslaved Virginians came from African cultures for whom marketing and making prize crops were passionate markers of ethnic identity. It comes as no surprise that much of the day to day produce eaten by Virginia’s patrician planters was purchased, along with poultry and made objects, from the enslaved community. Squire, an enslaved man at Monticello sold the Jefferson family, no less than 13 different crops, including cucumbers, beets, lettuce, potatoes, and hops. Records from Mount Vernon, the estates of the Randolphs, Carters and Lees, all speak to an enslaved community that turned the produce of their truck patches into currency that was used to obtain specialty foods and beverages otherwise unobtainable—white flour, sugar, coffee, spices and liquor; or gunpowder for hunting, Bibles for religious observance, fabric for clothing destined for Saturday night dances or Sunday meetings in the secret spaces known as “brush arbors,” the beginnings of the African American church. Money from gardens purchased parts needed to complete an entire orchestra of garden grown gourd-based instruments from banjos, to fiddles,



Michael Twitty at the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, in his portable slave garden exhibit.
Photo Courtesy of Michael Twitty

to drums known as quaquas, to rattles known in Africa as shekere.

As these crops entered the kitchens of the “big house,” a whole new cuisine was born fusing the foodways of southeastern England, the Chesapeake natives and the ethnic groups of West and Central Africa—the Wolof, the Manding, Fula, Bamana, Asante, Fante, Igbo, BaKongo and Mbundu. Okra was pickled, turned into savory soups and gumbos, and fried in spicy cornmeal. Black eyed peas were cooked with fat meat or formed the basis for vegetable soups and fritters. Rice became a key side dish, and watermelons—seeds, rind, fruit and all—were enjoyed from the summer and beyond. Sweet potatoes were baked in the ashes of the fireplace, and boiled in syrup until soft, in the West Indian fashion. Red peppers spiced up dishes along with other seasonings new

to the English palate. In short, Virginia was where much of Southern cooking, through the agency of enslaved Africans, was born.

The gardens of enslaved African Virginians were more than just a means to the end of being hungry. They were markers of identity and community power in the midst of the dehumanizing system of chattel slavery. The gardens made entrepreneurs of “field slaves,” market women of nurses and weavers, and some of America’s first culinary professionals from gardeners and cooks. Little did the watermen of Virginia’s mighty rivers know, that the little villages along their highways were the birthplace of the African presence in the American landscape. It was a part of their world, at once global and local in scope, that reverberates in its contributions to our day and time.

In the Kitchen and On the Table-

Excerpt from Almost Possum Stew
Reprinted with permission of
William Turnage

As the lifestyles of Virginians in the late 18th century differed from those of their late 20th-century counterparts, so did their diets.

Household records from Colonial Williamsburg indicate that breakfast tended to be a light meal of mostly liquids and fruit or porridge. Travelers, however, took a more substantial breakfast because the exact time of their next meal could be uncertain.

Dinner, which was served in the early afternoon, was the largest meal of the day and included at least two courses. Supper usually was served around 7p.m. and generally was light fare such as cold meat or fruit. Nothing more would be served that evening unless there was company in the household.

Servants and slaves usually got meat or fish at no more than one meal a day.

The kinds of foods served were dictated not only by what was available, but also by what was fresh. Fresh meat spoiled quickly and could be eaten only shortly after slaughtering. Most meat was slated, pickled or dried for storage. Because salt was difficult to get, some households boiled water from the Chesapeake Bay in iron pots to extract it for salting beef, pork and fish.

Wells, springs and ice houses also were used to keep food from spoiling. Plantation ice houses originally were unlined and later brick-lined pits in the ground that held ice in the winter months.

Beef is believed to have been the most popular meat among Colonial Virginians, who both raised their own cattle and imported beef from England. The Colonial diet extended beyond choice roasts and steaks to offal. Beef tongue was a common “company” dish.



Fall Harvest,
Photo Courtesy of Michael Twitty

Pork also was a popular meat, and Virginia hams are known to have been sent to New York, Jamaica and England. Sausage was considered a dinner dish, and bacon or ham often was served with other meats.

Chickens were fried, fricasseed, roasted and stewed. An 18th-century hen’s egg was considerably smaller than eggs available today.

Game such as venison and rabbit was also common in the Virginian’s diet, as were fish, shellfish, crabs and turtle. George Washington documented spreading burnt oyster shells on his fields for fertilizer.

Colonists grew squash, cucumbers, potatoes, melons, cantaloupe, raspberries, strawberries, and quinces and salad ingredients such as celery, radishes, watercress and endive. Records show they also made slaw with cabbage. Tomatoes were considered mostly decorative until the second half of the 19th century.

Olive oil was used to season salads, and beef or pork lard to fry foods.

Coffee houses were common and popular in settled areas, coffee being cheaper than tea, which was expensive enough that many households kept it under lock and key...

“An Art Most Difficult of Attainment”: Tobacco Cultivation in 18th Century Maryland

By Matt Mattingly

Editor’s Note- Mr. Mattingly is the Manager of the National Colonial Farm & Historic Interpretation at the Accokeek Foundation. The Farm located at 3400 Bryan Point Road, Accokeek, MD. 20607, is one of the only places left in Maryland that grows tobacco, since the tobacco buyout. They do educational programs that show what life was like on the other side of the river from Mount Vernon and help keep the view from Mount Vernon the same as it would have been when President Washington lived there.

“Tobacco, as our Staple, is our all, and Indeed leaves no room for anything Else.” So wrote Benedict Leonard Calvert to his brother, the Lord Proprietor on August 31, 1724. For all that’s been written on the subject of colonial tobacco production and cultivation, there is probably no better, succinct quote than the above. It neither overstates nor understates the impact that tobacco had on the lives’ of colonists in the Tidewater area throughout the colonial period. From George Washington to the most humble planter, tobacco dominated at least 10 months out of the year. It required their constant attention, anyone could produce a tobacco crop, but producing a “merchantable crop” was another matter all together. Tobacco was more than just a “cash crop,” it was also a means for planters, great and small, to establish themselves in their respective communities. It gave men reputations for industriousness and skill for good crops, and could as easily make you the subject of gossip and derision for a poor crop.

So what does all this mean? I mean, how hard could it have been to produce a crop of tobacco, people have been doing it for hundreds of years now, haven’t they? Let me lead you through the agricultural year for the Bolton family (This is the family the *National Colonial Farm* interprets at our site in Accokeek, Maryland). The Bolton’s were a small land-owning family in Prince George’s County in the year 1775. Like everyone, they produced tobacco, corn and wheat. Their year might have begun something like this....

Tobacco seeds are small, *really* small. Were you to simply broadcast them over a field they’d

be choked out by even the most pathetic weed. No, your tobacco seeds required their own special bed, around a half acre. The tools you had to make this seed bed were fire, an axe and a hoe. During the early months of January to March planters cleared out new fields for planting while saving that half acre for their tobacco seed bed. Tobacco loves to grow in freshly cleared fields and since one adult hand was expected to tend to three acres in tobacco and three in corn, your winter would be spent clearing out forest with an axe to make these fields. The area for the seed bed would be burned out to clear away weed seeds and insects. In Virginia, an accepted time for sowing tobacco seeds was a couple of weeks after Christmas, in Maryland they’d wait until March. Once the seeds had been sown, the planter would cover them with pine or cedar boughs to protect them from the cold. On warm, sunny days the beds would be uncovered and at night they would be covered up again. The planter would keep an eye on the young plants, watching for tell tale signs of Flea-beetle damage. To combat this pest they would sometimes broadcast lettuce seeds with the tobacco seeds and plant white mustard seed around the beds. The beetle would eat the mustard while the lettuce repelled them....supposedly.

May was the time when tobacco seedlings were transplanted from seed bed to field. But you had some work to do before that could happen. Since so many tobacco fields were freshly cleared fields, ploughs couldn’t be used as they were unable to get through the intense root systems left by the trees. The Native Americans showed the colonists that if you can’t plant *in* the ground, then



This year's tobacco crop at National Colonial Farm, the house on the left is the farmhouse. Behind the crop is the tobacco drying house.

Photo by Ashley Egan

plant *above* it. The planter, his family and slaves would head out to the tobacco fields and start chopping up the soil with nothing more than a hoe and start making hills three feet apart. One person could average 32 hills an hour or 320 in a ten hour day. Sometimes they made as many as 500! The hill culture would be the accepted method for planting until after the Revolution when the plow took over. It is worth noting that the introduction of the plow to tobacco planting, though saving the planter massive amounts of time proved to be an absolute disaster for the soil. The rate of erosion along the Potomac alone caused the ruin of the once bustling hamlet of Piscataway by the early 1800's. So much sediment had filled in the once navigable creeks that merchants ships were no longer able to reach the ports. Without these ships, there was no need for a town.

On a rainy day in May, called a "*Season*," the planter would run to his tobacco seed beds and gather up his seedlings and plant them in the fields in the prepared hills. Pulling the seedlings out of the wet earth was less shocking to them and made the transition easier. The colonists were so committed to this practice that government business

was sometimes suspended when "*plantable weather*" approached! Since Mother Nature can be fickle the planter might have to stagger his plantings over several weeks. He could do this until the last week in June. After that the tobacco wouldn't mature before the year's first frost.

From this moment on the success of the Boltons' tobacco crop depended largely on one thing; how much work they were willing to do. The tobacco plants had to be weeded at least twice before they were strong and tall enough to compete with the weeds. Daily, Joshua Bolton, his wife Priscilla, their older children and their slave Cate Sharper ventured out to weed the hills. By some accounts planters could get as many as 4000 to 5000 plants per acre! That meant you'd be tending to 12,000 to 15,000 plants total! And don't forget, you had to do the same for your corn! Did I forget to mention corn? Like tobacco, corn was planted in hills too. Since the *Indian Corn* or *Virginia Gourdseed Corn* was so tall (12 to 15 feet tall) it could be planted farther apart than the tobacco which required fewer hills, hence less work. Since corn was planted in April you had just enough time to weed it twice before you "*Laid the field by*,"

(the practice of abandoning it until harvest) and then devoted all your time to your tobacco.

By mid-July the Bolton's tobacco had been weeded and now it was time to "top" the tobacco. As the plant grows it's going to eventually flower (The seed pods develop in the flower and since one plant produced more than enough seed the planter only allowed a few plants to actually produce flowers), the planter would go through his fields and "top" or pinch off that flower as soon as it appeared. This would stop the plant from growing and send all the nutrients to the existing leaves which made them thicker, larger and ultimately worth more money. Only the planter or his most experienced slaves would be allowed to top the tobacco plants. Some planters would let their thumb nails grow long and then sharpen and harden them by a candle's flame for topping. Topping caused the plant to put forth new leaves, which the planter didn't want, so about once a week or more Joshua Bolton would have to "sucker" his tobacco. This was carefully pulling off the new leaves without damaging the existing ones.

From the end of June until the end of August the planter and his family engaged in what was termed the "Nauseous Occupation" or the eradication of the tobacco hornworm! This green worm, which looks just the same as the tomato hornworm, exists to eat tobacco, 337 square inches a day! Everyday the Boltons would head out to



The Tobacco Hornworm,
photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

the field and check each leaf on each plant, front and back looking for the worm or its eggs. When they found either they dispatched them by hand or foot. It doesn't get any more disgusting than handling a plant that has the texture of fly paper and then squishing worms with sticky fingers! But since the worm ate their money, the Boltons, like all good planters, devoted as much time as nature allowed in checking the plants. Letting your turkeys and other fowl run through the tobacco fields might help keep down the worms, but any way you cut it, you were going to get dirty, really, really dirty.

In September, when nearly all the leaves were tinged with yellow and they felt thick to the touch, Joshua Bolton cut his tobacco. You might be surprised to learn just how rarely colonial planters referred to this as "harvesting" tobacco. It is almost always referred to as "cutting" tobacco. Perhaps this is because when you harvest something -like corn or wheat- that implies that you're done with it, the agricultural year is finished. With tobacco, cutting is followed closely by the curing process which is arguably the most important part of the whole endeavor. As one colonial observer noted, "*Half the value of the plant lies in its manipulation after it's been cut.*"

Did Joshua Bolton cut his tobacco too soon? Too late? Did he manage his fields and labor properly throughout the year? All this is effected how his tobacco cured. Curing in colonial times was an art, an art "*most difficult of attainment.*" It was the planter's decisions from here on out that determined the value of his crop. Here is where one made a name for himself. When the planter cut his tobacco he left it outside for up to a week to allow it to lose its fresh weight, and only then did he stake it and bring it to the tobacco house to cure. Maryland tobacco houses, unlike their Virginia counterparts, were raised a foot above the ground to allow maximum air circulation. Once the tobacco was hung in the tobacco barn it would cure for 4 to 6 weeks. Planters like Joshua Bolton checked their tobacco daily for signs of damage or rot. Too much or too little humidity could damage the leaves and their profits. If it was too humid some planters would light small fires in the barn to dry it out but that left a smoky flavor to the tobacco



Please note the mound technique in the growing of the tobacco.

Photo by Ashley Egan

that drew a lower price. So the question was, what were you prepared to do?

When the tobacco was done curing the planter would then “*strike, sort and prize*” his tobacco. When the weather turned slightly damp, the tobacco would enter what was called “*case*”. When in case the leaves were extremely pliable, almost like a soft leather. The leaves would be struck from the stalk and then sorted into different grades. When this process was finished the leaves would be tied into “*hands*” where the leaves of similar quality were tied together by a binding leaf that ended up resembling an old fashioned baseball mitt. These hands were then prized or pressed into the large barrels known as “*hogsheads*.” A tobacco prize, for the Bolton’s, was a simple lever device that pressed the carefully arranged hands into the hogshead over a considerable amount of time. This was one part of the process that you did not want to rush through. Poor prizing caused tobacco to rot long before it ever reached England. The Bolton’s would have prized an average of 1000 to 1500 pounds of merchantable tobacco.

Before it was even put on a ship the tobacco

had to be inspected as per the law of 1747. The Bolton’s took their 1000 pound hogshead to the tobacco inspection station in Piscataway where the inspector would open up the hogshead and check the quality of the crop. Any tobacco found to be “*trash*” was ordered to be burned there on the spot to preserve the quality and reputation of the colony’s tobacco. Lazy planters who turned a blind eye to their crop during the year might well find their year’s efforts for naught at this moment.

After inspection most smaller planters sold their crop to “*Factors*,” men who lived in the colony and set up shop for foreign companies like *Glassford and Company* or *Simpson & Baird*. In our area of Prince George’s County, most of these factors represented Scottish firms and freely extended the planters credit towards purchases and future crops. The Bolton’s might have averaged the usual pence a pound for their tobacco and that would have allowed them to purchase those goods that would get them through the year but little more. Planters tended to buy cloth or clothing, sugar, iron goods, ceramics and liquor and hired carpenters and coopers during prosperous years and tended to do more with less during depressions. It was



Curing Tobacco,
Photo by Nadia Grenier

still very difficult to get ahead unless one accepted the “generous” credit from the factors. By the Revolution the colonies carried a debt 2.5 times greater than the value of British goods.

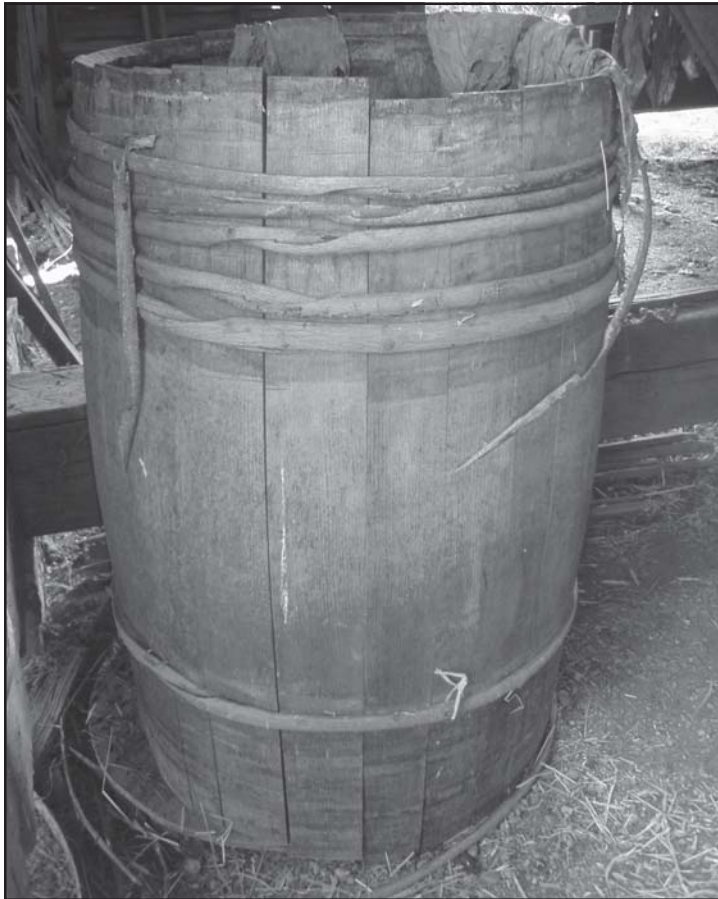
By winter the Boltons would have succeeded in producing the year’s crop. But since winter was the time for moving fences and clearing new fields for the next crop, they never really stopped in the cultivation of tobacco. The amount of time and labor the colonist devoted to this “*deceivable weed*” gave birth to a culture deeply rooted in not only agriculture but heritage as well.

Tobacco cultivation restricted social interaction among colonists because of the time it required but also because of the land one needed to be successful at it over the long term. Every five years planters would rotate their fields. Old fields were left fallow for 20 to 25 years before they regained enough fertility to be planted in again. To insure that they and their children would

have enough fertile lands, all farms had to be at least 50 acres. With so many large farms it was difficult for towns to form and folks to meet.

But tobacco also tied people together. During the hot, humid months of July and August when you were knee deep in weeds and worms, you could rest assured that your nearest neighbor was in the exact same position! When it came time to cure the crop and you fretted over the process you’d know that even the great George Washington was as stressed! Tobacco cultivation fostered a form of social cohesion.

At theFarm we try very hard to preserve that *culture*, to help people better understand the historic relationship between people and the land. We hope that the more they respect the history of the land, the more inclined they’ll be to preserve and protect it in the future. Of all the nice things ever said about our farm, the one that always gets me is when I hear a person say, after hearing the tobacco saga, “*Boy, I had no idea...*”



A Hogshead Barrel at the National Colonial Farm,
Photo by Nadia Grenier

Did You Know?

A hogshead is a unit of measurement, usually of alcoholic beverages, such as: ale, mead, or beer.

One hogshead is equal to approximately 63 gallons. Traditionally, tobacco was shipped in hogsheads and crop payment was based on the amount of hogsheads filled.

